

**An examination of
sites receiving
asbestos-contaminated
vermiculite ore from
Libby, Montana**

National Asbestos EXPOSURE REVIEW

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The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease (ATSDR) is a federal public health agency under the Department of Health and Human Services that addresses toxic substances in the environment and how they affect people.

ATSDR is reviewing locations around the country that received shipments of vermiculite from a mining operation in Montana. The contaminated vermiculite came from Libby, MT, and was shipped as a commercial product to approximately 244 locations around the U.S. for processing and packaging. ATSDR will initially be reviewing 30 of the locations.

The review is being done to determine whether the people could have been or are being exposed to the asbestos contained in the vermiculite ore.

Background

Vermiculite, which is used in lawn and garden products, various building materials, and in insulation, was mined and processed in Libby, MT, from the early 1920s until 1990. Although most vermiculite products pose no health problem, the vermiculite ore from the Libby mine was contaminated with asbestos. Studies have shown that people who worked in the mine and processing facilities and people who lived in the community were exposed to asbestos-contaminated vermiculite during the time the facilities were in operation. Prolonged exposure to asbestos can cause very serious health problems, including asbestosis and lung cancer.

Records show that the vermiculite ore from Libby was shipped to locations around the U.S.

Former workers and people around these sites where the vermiculite was shipped may have been exposed to asbestos in ways such as handling of the ore, playing in the by-products, or workers taking home dust on their clothes.

The National Asbestos Exposure Review will work with other federal, state, and local environmental and public health agencies to:

- Evaluate selected sites to identify past and present exposure pathways (ways in which the community could have been exposed to asbestos from contaminated vermiculite).
- Evaluate exposure pathways at selected sites to determine 1) if there is a significant hazard to public health and 2) what further actions are necessary to protect public health.

- Formulate a plan for determining additional public health actions at sites not considered in the initial evaluation.

Initial Site Selection Criteria

Based upon data that was collected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), ATSDR selected 30 sites for the initial review. These sites were selected if the sites met one of the following criteria:

- EPA required further action at the site based upon contamination in place, or
- The site was an exfoliation facility that processed more than 100,000 tons of vermiculite ore from Libby mine. Exfoliation is a type of processing that is expected to release more asbestos than other processing methods, based on studies by EPA and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

The initial list of sites may change based upon further review of the data or if new site-specific information becomes available.

ATSDR Activities

Working with federal, state and local partners, ATSDR initially will conduct or coordinate health consultations at 30 sites selected for initial review. A health consultation provides advice on a specific public health issue related to real or possible human exposure to toxic materials. ATSDR has offered cooperative agreement states





the opportunity to conduct health consultations for sites within their state. Several states have elected to participate in the project. Another way states may get involved in the project is by applying for a grant from ATSDR's Division of Health Studies to perform health statistics reviews around sites in their state. State activities will be coordinated through ATSDR's regional offices and technical project officers in ATSDR's Atlanta headquarters. The National Asbestos Exposure Review team, also located in Atlanta, will work with the regions and states to ensure national consistency, work with regions to perform health consultations for those sites without a state lead, and compile all findings in a comprehensive report.

For More Information

For more information about the National Asbestos Exposure Review, contact ATSDR's Information Center at 1-800-42ATSDR. Information about asbestos, vermiculite, and Libby, MT, also may be found at ATSDR's web site, www.atsdr.cdc.gov